

They're back

Strong population of Piping Plovers returns to nest

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Last spring, a record number of piping plover shorebirds returned to Duxbury Beach to nest and raise their chicks; this year the trend continues with 15 pairs of birds and nine nests counted on the beach so far.

According to Duxbury Town Manager RenRead, the plovers are back but the beach is still open to oversand vehicles. All of the nests are between the areas north of Duxbury Beach Park, or Blakeman's, to just north of the second crossover.

"As of this moment, the two ORV access ramps (crossovers) are not threatened to close," Read said on Monday. "Please note that the beach is open for patrons to enjoy."

An abundance of piping plovers can lead to beach closures, such as in 2013 when the birds nested near all three vehicle crossovers and the beach was closed for a month from early June to mid-July.

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And last year when last year when the piping plovers broke their population records with a total of 25 nests on the beach by mid-June and the town protected them by cutting in half the number of vehicles allowed to drive onto the beach. Piping plovers along the Atlantic coast are classified as a "threatened" species under the federal Endangered Species Act, which means the population will continue to decrease if they are not protected. The Endangered Species Act provides penalties for taking, harassing or harming the birds and therefore, the town and the beach's owners, The Duxbury Beach Reservation Inc., have taken many measures to protect them and their habitat on the beach. Sometimes, this means closing the beach to people or restricting their access.

Read and the Reservation are keeping a close watch on the piping plovers and their nesting sites. It usually takes 28 days for eggs to hatch and another 28 to 30 days for the plover chicks to fledge, or learn to fly, which means until then they are more vulnerable to dangers from people and predators. Often storms or predators kill the chicks, which causes the birds re-nest and re-starts the incubation clock, moving the date further into the summer when the beach is clear of plovers.

If everything moves smoothly for the birds currently on the beach, they could hatch chicks as early as the week of May 25, Read said.

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